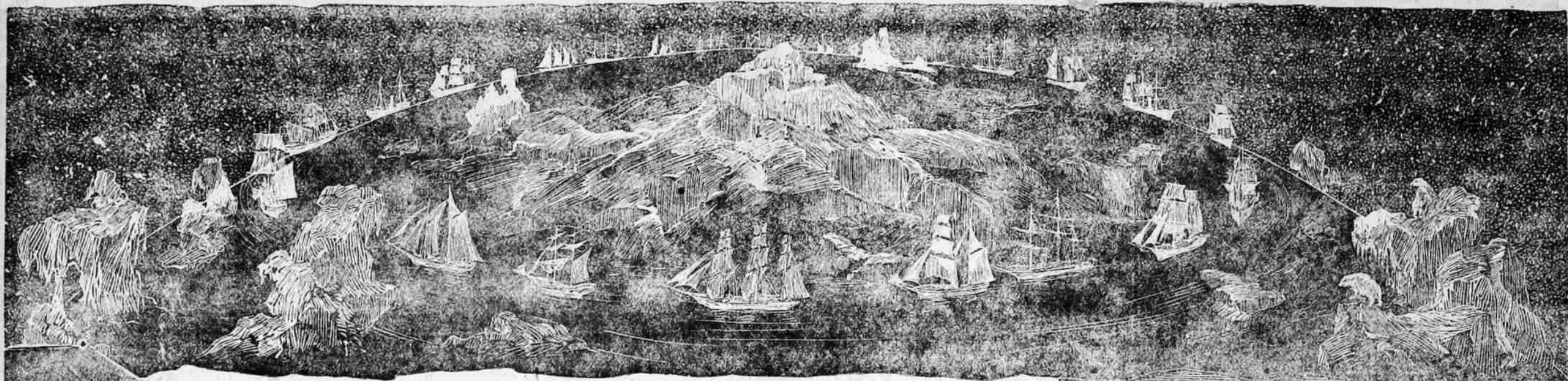


The Standard-Examiner Sunday Feature Section

To Search For the North Pole's Strange Phantom Fleet



*How Captain Amundsen's Expedition
Hopes to Find the Ships of Men Long
Since Dead Which Are Believed to
Drift Ghost-Like Through the
Frozen North With Only
Skeleton Hands to
Guide Them*

Captain Amundsen and one of his aides testing an airplane for their proposed flight straight across the North Pole

FOR the sake of science, to increase the sum of human knowledge and happiness, men have dared much. They have risked—often given—their lives and their all. Neither human bigotry and cruelty nor the fiercest forces of nature could daunt them.

Captain Roald Amundsen's expedition, now on its way to cruise the Arctic wastes about the North Pole, is certain to encounter its full share of mortal peril. But the prizes sought are deemed well worth the risk—scientific data which may prove to be of great value, the study of the ocean and magnetic currents, the drift of the ice pack and the movements of the air in that strange wilderness of ice at the top of the world.

And there also lies in store for Amundsen and his men as thrilling a prospect as explorers ever faced. They may have the luck to behold something heretofore never known outside the vivid imaginings of poets and other weavers of legend and romance.

It may be their lot to find the port of missing ships, to see the realities of such a ghostly craft as the Flying Dutchman is said to hold before the wind and the ice-locked bark of the Ancient Mariner. They may bring back to civilization the weird truth about the Phantom Fleet of the Frozen North—that ghostly procession of the ships of whalers, explorers and other men long since dead which is said to drift to this day about the Pole.

As Captain Amundsen's good ship Maud sails across the Polar Basin his lookouts will eagerly scan those dreary wastes for the snow-shrouded sails of that restless company of lost ships. Year in and year out, so the Eskimos relate, that frozen fleet circles majestically about the North Pole, "gripped in the inexorable clutch of the great ice floes."

What a magnificent pageant of the Snow King it must be! The tropic Gulf Stream reads and breaks the ships which are its prey in more southerly seas, but the icy current of the North preserves them in a glassy mold and for centuries displays them as the trophies of its might over the man-made things that dared defy it.

Sails set as if for all eternity in a frozen rigor that allows no flapping in the cutting blasts which once belled them full, blocks stiff on tackle, rigging a mass of icicles in veritable Gothic tracery, the Phantom Fleet sails on and on.

Nor does it lack all vestiges of its crews. The skeletons of brave seamen who laughed at the dangers of the North still man the vessels which they would not abandon. Comrades may have fled across the floes with sled and dogs, but these spectral sailors faced the un-

knownable at their posts on their ships.

Here a ghastly apparition with hollow eyes and grinning teeth may be peering from a porthole of a chart room. There a lookout, whose fur-muffled bones rattle in the wind, may still be keeping his last watch for the break in the ice which never came while life lasted. At the wheel of some old whaler the corpse of the helmsman, bony fingers clamped upon the spokes, is perhaps holding to this day his ship with uncanny skill on its endless course through the uncharted wastes.

Such is the spectacle of awful grandeur which may meet the startled eyes of Amundsen and his men, if the insistent stories of the Eskimos are true. And explorers have always found these people of the Far North extraordinarily trustworthy.

It may be led, may the Phantom Fleet—and who shall say nay, when ages are as days under the magic touch of the frozen Arctic?—by the rakish figurehead galleys of the Norsemen, skeletons in armor bowed over shattered oars, and what was once a giant Viking stark against the mast. For the Norsemen sailed these polar seas and in the year 1197 discovered Spitzbergen which they called Svalbard, or the Cool Coast.

Then may come cruising the company of those other brave explorers, who, although not "the first who ever burst into that sunless sea," are still remembered for the boldness with which they dared its terrors with tiny craft and scanty supplies.

Leading them is, perhaps, the intrepid Henry Hudson, grasping the tiller of the small boat in which he and his small son and a few loyal sailors were cast off to die by the mutinous crew of the Discovery.

Perhaps floating on a cake of ice near by is the body of Henry Greene, the treacherous fellow whom Hudson befriended, only to have him turn on him in the mutiny—Greene, who shortly after his evil deed was slain by Eskimos.

There may follow in the circling line other ships not so easily recognizable. After them, the Suvorin, the Russian vessel frozen in near Franz Josef Land and never heard of again after part of her crew had made a dash to safety over the ice; the Russian ship Hercules, last heard of in 1912, on her way to the Kara Sea; and scores of whaling ships from American ports, still manned by the frozen mariners who refused to desert them.

In line may be the two ships of Sir John Franklin, who set out so long ago to conquer the same Northwest Passage which cost old Henry Hudson his life. The dead navigator may still retain his ghostly command, but the bodies of a



Sir John Collier's famous painting, showing Henry Hudson and his young son facing death in the open boat in which the explorer's mutinous sailors set them adrift. This craft of centuries ago may still survive as part of the "Phantom Fleet" which the Eskimos report having seen

hundred of his crew are lying in the stretch of ice to the south, perished from freezing, starvation and scurvy. Not a man lived to tell the terrible tale. And the ship of the luckless German expedition of Schroeder Stranz also should be in the Phantom Fleet, its coating of ice mirroring all the glorious colors of the Northern Lights.

All this it may be given to Amundsen and his men to look upon. It may even be their fortune to steer their ship "across the bar" and into the ranks of the Phantom Fleet, for destiny hangs by a thread in the Arctic. If they finally do escape the perils of the Frozen North and succeed in getting back to civilization it may be after one of those thrilling races with death which fill so many chapters of the history of Arctic exploration.

This last was the fate of the crew of the Herzog Ernest, of the Schroeder Stranz expedition, who made a gallant struggle against frightful odds.

The ship froze in Treuburg Bay, Spitzbergen, in August, 1912. All quit the ship, but the Norwegian members of the crew returned and the Germans pressed on. The latter broke up into two parties, one of which dropped out of

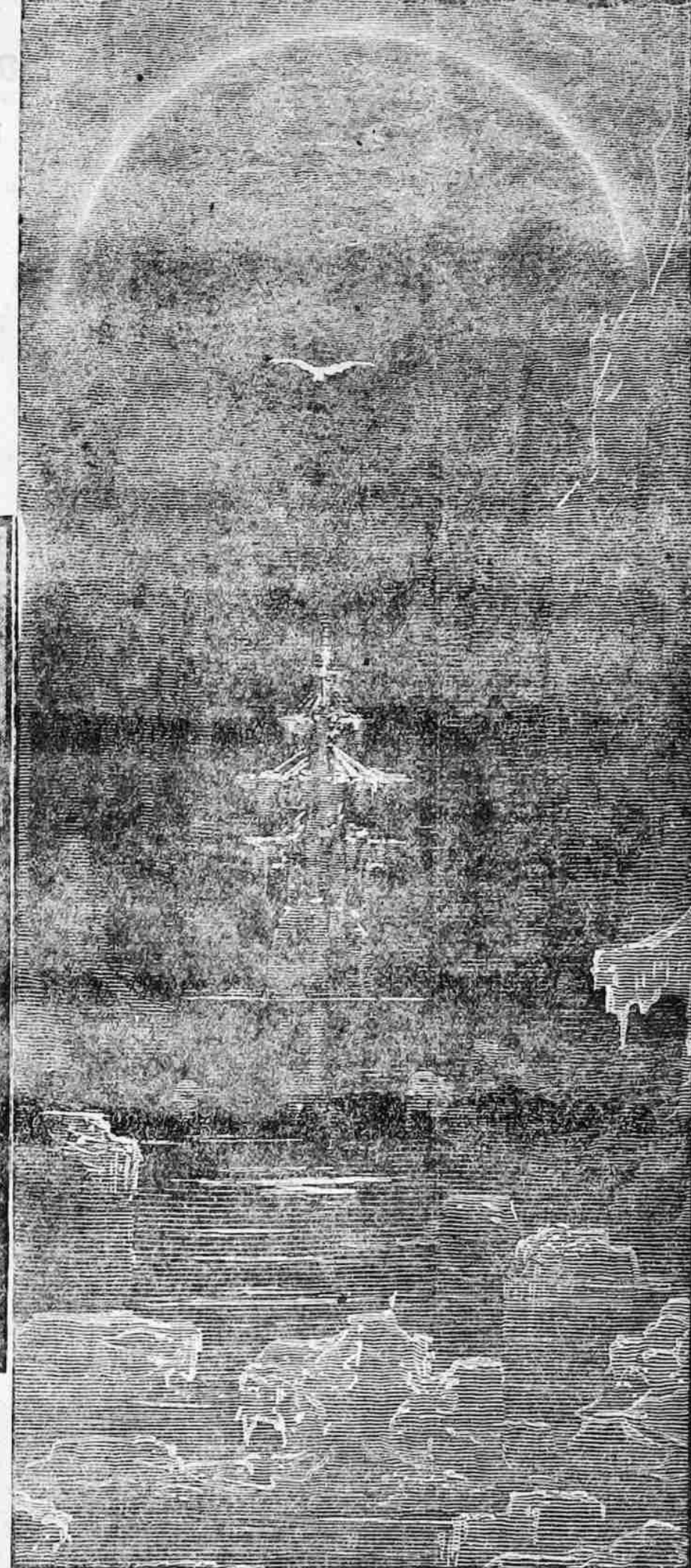
sight into eternity. The other group marched five days and reached a hut, near which they shot reindeer and rested. There a Dr. Ruediger, who was frostbitten, was left with a man named Rave, while the rest pushed on.

For seven weeks the two waited without aid or news, until their supply of food had shrunk to an allowance of one meal a day of mildewed oats and salt meat. When their last shirt had been used for bandages they decided to attempt to beat their way back to the ship.

They staggered on, half dead from cold and hunger. The doctor's foot was so frozen that it was crumbling away bit by bit. Although his companion's fingers were frostbitten he made the doctor a wonderful mechanical boot from pieces of leather and cloth and wood.

Traveling as best they could a few hours at a time, they at last reached a spot where they found some moldy biscuits, which gave them the strength to go on. During the last dash it was necessary for Rave to amputate the fore part of the doctor's left foot and both his own fourth fingers. Finally they made the ship.

Captain Amundsen and his men are



One of Gustave Dore's impressive illustrations for Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," showing the fate which has overtaken the gallant crews of so many ships in the Arctic when "the ice was here, the ice was there, the ice was all around"

well equipped to cope with such perils as these. In addition to searching for the Phantom Fleet, they will make investigations to determine if land exists in the vicinity of the Pole. Also they will bore holes through the ice and measure the ocean depths, the direction and strength of the submarine currents and their chemical composition.

The expedition is equipped with two airplanes, one with a capacity for nine passengers and the other for three. By aid of these planes Captain Amundsen expects to be able to explore vast stretches of territory which otherwise would be inaccessible, and even to fly straight across the Pole.

The formidable dangers of the Arctic have been guarded against in every possible way by the experienced Amundsen. Seven years' provisions are being taken along and sixty tons of fuel oil. Husky

dogs, with sleds, in case the vessel should be frozen in the ice, are another of the precautions.

It is hoped that the scientific information which will be brought back by Amundsen will revolutionize present-day meteorological and oceanographical knowledge, enabling us to predict weather conditions with greater accuracy and to make ocean travel safer.

But the most dramatic object of the expedition now under way, and the one the world is most anxious to hear about, is the Phantom Fleet. Scientists are inclined to believe that this spectral assemblage of ships is a reality—that many of the long-lost vessels of other days have been preserved just as the Eskimos say they have, and in summer, when the ice melts enough to float them, are carried by the strong Arctic currents back and forth around the Pole.